

Plains Public Housing - 9A
(Jimmy Carter Dura Apartment)
Southeast corner of Paschal and Thomas streets
Plains
Sumter County
Georgia

HABS No. GA-2210

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Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, DC 20013-7127

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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

PLAINS PUBLIC HOUSING - 9A (Jimmy Carter Dura Apartment)

HABS No. GA-2210

Location: Southeast corner of Paschal and Thomas streets, unit 9A in the Dura Apartments Public Housing Project (Project GA 62-6), Plains, Sumter County, Georgia.

USGS Plains Georgia Quadrangle, Universal Transverse Mercator
Coordinates: Zone 16, N 3547215; E 745780.

Present Owner: Americus Housing Authority.

Present Occupant/Use: The west half of the duplex is vacant; the east half is used as an office by the National Park Service staff at the Jimmy Carter National Historic Site.

Significance: After his father's death in 1953, Jimmy Carter left the U.S. Navy and returned to Plains to take over the family peanut business. The Carters and their three young sons moved into unit 9A of the Dura Apartments, one of six Federal Housing Projects built by the Americus Housing Authority in 1953 in Plains and the nearby towns of Leslie and Andersonville. The residence, not surprisingly, is an unadorned, utilitarian space, for as Carter wrote in Why Not the Best?, "Not having any assured income, we applied for and were assigned an apartment in the new housing project in Plains."¹

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: 1953.
2. Architect: Abreu & Robeson Inc., architects and engineers. Atlanta, Georgia. Francis Abreu (1896-1969) and James Robeson (1905-) have been noted as some of the best Atlanta architects specializing in hospitals. Both became members of the Southern Georgia Chapter of the American Institute of Architects in 1942, two years after they formed their partnership.
3. Original and subsequent owners: The Americus Housing Authority purchased the property and built the homes with the assistance of the Housing and Home Finance Agency, acting through the U.S. Public

¹ Jimmy Carter, Why Not the Best?, 1976, p. 65.

Housing Administration. The Americus Housing Authority continues to own the property.

4. Builder, contractor, suppliers: E.A. Scott and Sons of Americus was the general contractor. Suppliers and products include the Mississippi Glass Company, "Factrolite" glass; Southern States Iron Roofing Company; "Thulman" type metal chimneys.
 5. Original plans and construction: The Americus Housing Authority possesses the original plans by Abreu and Robeson (November 19, 1952) for Low Rent Housing Projects GA 62-4, 5, 6, 7, 8, and 9, which are basically identical. The plans show cross sections of the walls and porches, a typical floor plan, and typical elevations, as well as the site plan for the entire Dura Apartments Project. A large manual published by the architects describes in detail the construction and materials used for the six projects built that year.
 6. Alterations and additions: Building No. 9 appears much the same as it did when the Carters became 9A's first occupants in 1953. Changes include the conversion from fuel oil to electrical-strip heating in the 1970s. Square internal brick chimneys and the fuel-oil heaters in the living rooms of the duplex were also removed at this time. Originally the roof was clad with a white, grooved asbestos and concrete roof tile that was later replaced with shingles. Appliances have been replaced.
- B. Historical Context: The Americus Housing Authority, funded in part by the federal government, was created in 1949 and now owns and maintains more than 1,000 units in Americus and surrounding towns. The City of Plains, under the leadership of Mayor W.A. Carter, realized the need for such a project in 1951, and unanimously adopted a resolution at a special meeting on February 15. The resolution states that whereas "unsafe and unsanitary accommodations" existed in Plains, the Americus Housing Authority applied to the Public Housing Administration under the provisions of the U.S. Housing Act of 1937 for a loan of \$17,500 for units to be built in Plains.² By September 27, 1951, all of the legal matters were met and the city council discussed the selection of sites for ten "white" units and fourteen "colored" units. Aerial photographs show that construction was still underway in March 1953, with No. 9 completed first.
- The Carters moved into the apartment with their three sons in 1953 because they had no assured income. During the year they lived in the unit, Jimmy Carter worked long hours at the peanut warehouse, trying to resurrect the business during one of the worst droughts Georgia has suffered (see HABS No. GA-2202). Rosalynn Carter remembers that the women who lived in these

² Plains City Council Minutes, February 15, 1951.

houses would converse as they hung their laundry and watched their children play together on the paved area between the units. This was not only a financially difficult time for the family, but also a period of adjustment to living once again in the small town where they grew up after several exciting years of travel. Although the couple grossed less than \$200 their first year back in Plains, by the second year, they made too much money to qualify for the federal project and moved out of the unit.³

The apartment was dedicated to the Carters at a ceremony January 22, 1987 and a plaque was mounted on the unit. The Americus Housing Authority, in conjunction with the National Park Service, plans to restore the west half to its 1950s appearance, the time when it was occupied by the Carters. The other eight units in the project are occupied by low-income families.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: This undistinguished, one-story, rectangular duplex with no ornamentation or styling is characteristic of inexpensive public housing of the 1950s.
2. Condition of fabric: Excellent.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: This duplex is 66'-9" x 27'-4" with eight bays on the front/north and rear/south facades; each end facade has two bays. Each apartment features four bays.
2. Foundations: A 6" slab of Portland cement with crushed stone slag or gravel forms the subfloor. These concrete slabs are reinforced 1" below the top of the slab with 6"x 6" x 10/10 wire mesh. The walls continue 1'-8" into the ground and are set on a 10" concrete base.
3. Walls: Common-bonded brick with flush vertical joints and raked horizontal joints.
4. Structural system, framing: The walls are constructed of load-bearing concrete block and brick. Hollow 8" x 16" x 3-1/2" concrete blocks form an inner shell. These are faced with 3-1/2" bricks with a 2-1/2" air space in between, for a total wall thickness of 8-1/2". Wall ties spaced 16" on center vertically and 24" on center horizontally join the brick and

³ Rosalynn Carter, 1988 interview.

concrete walls. The framing lumber is Southern Pine with roof trusses, ceiling joists and rafters resting on 2" x 10" plates bolted to the masonry walls. The roof trusses are 2" x 6"s spaced 2' on center and cross bridged at the center with 1" x 6"s.

5. Porches, stoops: Concrete slabs in front of the two end bays, supported on 8" subterranean masonry foundations, form the front porch for each residence. These small, open, rectangular porches are covered by shed roofs with wrought-iron supports. Each residence also features a small square concrete slab at the back door. This area is sheltered by a small aluminum awning.
6. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: The single front doors are located in the second bay from each end on the north facade. Each front entrance has a wood two-panel screen door. The front door of 9B is a six-panel wood door, whereas the 9A door is unpanelled, probably a recent replacement.

The rear doors, in the same bays on the south facade are two-panel three-light doors with aluminum screens. All doors are set in metal frames.
 - b. Windows: The windows throughout are six-over-six-light double-hung sash in aluminum casings with precast concrete slip sills and full-height screens. The north facade includes four double windows in the four bays between the two doors, and single windows on each end. Each gable-end facade has a double window in the northernmost bay and a single window in the south bay. Across the rear facade there are single windows in the end bays, double windows in the two center bays and small bathroom windows in the third bay from each end.
7. Roof:
 - a. Shape, covering: The side-facing gable roof is covered with shingles. It was originally clad with white asbestos and concrete tiles.
 - b. Cornice, eaves: Shallow closed eaves with an aluminum fascia and drip edges constructed of 26-gauge galvanized steel. The horizontal soffits contain 8" x 1'-8" vents centered over the windows.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans: The floor plans of the two one-story units are mirror images of each other. The front doors open into rectangular living rooms that encompass the outer two bays, with two-bay kitchens directly behind. Halls run the length of the unit accessing three one-bay bedrooms, two in the front pile and one in the rear pile. Bathroom and closet areas are situated in the two central bays between the back bedrooms and the kitchen and the bathrooms and closet areas. Each bedroom has a large recessed area with a bar for hanging clothes.
2. Flooring: Asphalt tile over concrete.
3. Wall and ceiling finish: Walls are 3-1/2" concrete block. When the Carters occupied 9A, its hall and living room were painted forest green; the kitchen yellow; and the bedrooms pink, blue, and green.
4. Doorways and doors: The door to each bedroom, as well as the closet adjacent to the front door in the living room, are wood with two-plywood panels. The doors to the bathrooms also feature two panels, but are somewhat narrower.
5. Hardware: All hardware was originally chrome plated, but it has been replaced.
6. Mechanical equipment:
 - a. Heating, air conditioning, ventilation: Heating was originally generated by an oil-fueled space heater with a 50,000-BTU per hour output; the unit itself was located in the living room. This system was replaced with electric strip heating in the 1970s. The units originally had no air conditioning. A window unit has been installed to serve the living room of unit 9B. Louvered vents at each end under the gables ventilate the attic.
 - b. Lighting: Each room and the hall features a central ceiling fixture. The bathroom fixture is above the medicine cabinet. Switchboxes are adjacent to door openings, 4' above the floor.
 - c. Plumbing: Each unit has one bathroom with a toilet, tub, and shower unit. Each kitchen has a double sink. The units have a 30-gallon hot-water heater.
 - d. Kitchen facilities: Each unit is supplied with an electric range, oven, and refrigerator.

D. Site:

1. General setting and orientation: The Dura Apartments are located on 1.855 acres with 251' fronting on Paschal Street and 332' fronting Thomas Street. The complex consists of two three-family units on the south side of the property, a two-family unit in the northwest corner facing Thomas Street, and the two-family unit of 9A and 9B at the northeast corner of the property facing north onto Paschal Street. A short driveway from Paschal Street on the east side of the building serves unit 9B, and a driveway leading from Paschal Street along the west facade of the building serves 9A. The units are situated so that the backyards of both the two-family units and one of the three-family units face each other.
2. Historic landscape: The duplex now has small shrubs planted around the walls and along the path leading to the front door. Originally, the housing specification manual called for planting Bermuda grass. Any additional plants or shrubs were planted by the tenants.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

- A. Original Architectural Drawings: The Americus Housing Authority has original blueprints dated November 16, 1952, for the units built that year.
- B. Early Views: 1953 U.S. Department of Agriculture, Agricultural Management aerial photograph shows the units under construction.

C. Interviews:

John Anderson, director, Americus Housing Authority, interview by Elizabeth Barthold, June 30, 1989, Americus, Georgia.

Jimmy and Rosalynn Carter, videotaped interview by Ed Bearss, National Park Service, May 1988, Plains, Georgia.

D. Bibliography:

1. Primary and unpublished sources:

City Council Board Meeting Minutes, February 15, 1951, Plains City Hall, Plains, Georgia.

Abreu & Robeson Inc., Architects and Engineers, "Specifications for Construction of Low Rent Housing Projects GA 62-4 - GA 62-9 in Andersonville, Plains and Leslie for the Housing Authority of the

City of Americus, Georgia, assisted by the Housing and Home Finance Agency acting through the Public Housing Administration," November 19, 1952, Americus Housing Authority, Americus, Georgia.

2. Secondary and published sources:

Carter, Jimmy, Why Not the Best?, Nashville, Tenn.: Broadman Press, 1975.

Carter, Rosalynn, First Lady From Plains, Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1984.

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Summer 1989